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April 16, 1979

Mr. Alexander D. Hall, Jr.
P.O. Box 596
St. Cloud, Florida
32769

Dear Mr. Hall:

Assistant Secretary Bennett has asked me as one who was deeply involved in the Jonestown tragedy to reply to your letter of March 29, 1979.

The factor that most determined the decision to return the bodies to the United States was the location where the event occurred. Jonestown was in a remote area in the northwestern district of Guyana, a poor underdeveloped country that does not have the resources to handle a tragedy as cataclysmic as that of November 18. When the scope of the disaster was learned, (a point to keep in mind is that with one exception all the deceased were American citizens) the Guyanese requested assistance in removing the bodies since they did not have the personnel and other resources needed to resolve such a problem.

Naturally, an immediate decision had to be made as to how to dispose of the remains of the Jonestown inhabitants since the bodies were rapidly decomposing in the tropical heat. As the Guyanese did not have sufficient personnel to cope with the massive task of identifying the remains and providing them with proper burial, the decision was made to return the bodies to the United States. This decision was made after a U.S. Air Force pathologist made an on-the-scene determination that the return of the bodies would not pose a health hazard.

Frankly, I do not see that any Government that purports to be responsive to its citizens could have acted differently. Moreover if the Justice Department's suit to recover the Governments expenses is successful, and there is no reason to assume otherwise at this time, then the cost to the taxpayer will be minimal.

I hope the above information clarifys this matter for you. If you have any further questions, please feel free to call me at area code 202 - 632-3449.

Sincerely,

Richard A. McCoy
Office of Caribbean Affairs